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ABSTRACT

In this paper the Academic Senate of the California Community Colleges addresses information competency and the need to expand students' information-gathering skills beyond that typically implemented at the present time in the curriculum of the California Community Colleges. Information competency is defined as the ability to find, evaluate, use and communicate information in all its various formats. Issues facing the California Community College faculty as they explore ways to provide information competency skills to students are examined. The paper also includes a list of key skills student require in order to find, evaluate, use, and communicate information, and provides models of implementation describing how information competency will be implemented in the California Community Colleges. In conclusion, the paper emphasizes the primary responsibility faculty have in determining curriculum and developing a program for information competency on college campuses. (AS)

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Information Competency in the California Community Colleges

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Information Competency in the California Community Colleges

The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges

Adopted Spring 1998

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ABSTRACT

Information competency is essential to student success in the Information Age. As stated in Resolution 16.2.0 passed by the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges at its Fall 1996 Plenary Session, the position of the Academic Senate is "that any development of information competency components and/or programs be the primary responsibility of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges." This paper seeks to address issues associated with information competency and commence the discussion on how these competencies can be incorporated into the California Community College curriculum. Issues to be discussed in this paper include a clear and concise definition of information competency, a listing of key components for information competency, expectations of what students need to know before they complete their educational endeavors, and how information competency will be implemented in the California Community Colleges. In addition to the student focus on information competency, the paper discusses the need for faculty development opportunities to develop and provide information competency.

INTRODUCTION

Competency in information skills is important for students to learn and use in life. Information competency is a topic that will affect the curriculum of the California Community Colleges. The faculty of the California Community Colleges will have the primary role in determining how it will be included in curriculum. The purpose of this paper is to respond to issues raised by the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges when it passed Resolution 16.2.0 at its Fall 1996 Plenary Session. The Resolution reads as follows:

> *F96 16.2 Information Competency*
>
> *Whereas information competency is the ability to: a) recognize the need for information, b) acquire and evaluate information, c) organize and maintain information, and d)interpret and communicate information, and*
>
> *Whereas information literacy is a curricular development responsibility of library faculty, and*
>
> *Whereas library faculty see information competency as an important component of learning, and*
>
> *Whereas a Board of Governors member plans to propose at the November 1996 Board of Governors meeting that the 10% Fund for Instructional Improvement set aside be used for the development of information competency components,*
>
> *Therefore be it resolved that the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges urge the Chancellor's Office and the Board of Governors to acknowledge that any development of information competency components and/or programs be the primary responsibility of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges.*

The need for an expansion of students' information-gathering skills beyond that typically implemented at the present time in the California Community Colleges and other segments of higher education in California has been documented by two reports issued in 1995--a report based on survey results of an Intersegmental Joint Faculty Project report and a report from a California State University (CSU) work group which addressed the issue of information competency in the CSU System (these reports are listed in the bibliography for this paper). Both of these reports were important in the development of this paper, for information competency is a key issue in all segments of public higher education in California.

Because of the connections between the California Community Colleges and other institutions--it is noted in the CSU report that two-thirds of all CSU graduates are transfers from community colleges--the need for intersegmental discussion and coordination of information competency is vital. The CSUs have identified the area of information competency as a high priority and a critical skill for all students. Principles for implementing information competency include the importance of faculty working with librarians (note: Librarians do not have faculty status in the CSU System), spreading information competency and the incorporation of information competency in general education requirements. The focus of the CSU System has been for each campus to develop its own plan to incorporate information competency, with encouragement for multi-campus projects. One such project consists of interactive computer-based modules teaching certain components of information competency.

DEFINITION

It is recommended that the definition of information competency be the following:

> **Information competency is the ability to find, evaluate, use, and communicate information in all its various formats. It combines aspects of library literacy, research methods and technological literacy. Information competency includes consideration of the ethical and legal implications of information and requires the application of both critical thinking and communication skills.**

ISSUES

Information competency is a critical skill for student success. It is necessary to ensure that students are able to function well in the Information Age. There is currently no organized effort in the California Community Colleges that seeks a comprehensive approach to information competency. Addressing this need, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges adopted Resolution 16.2.0 at its Fall 1996 Plenary Session to highlight the faculty leadership role in the curricular development of information competency requirements and courses.

This position paper will examine several issues that will be facing the faculty of the California Community Colleges as they explore ways to provide information competency skills. Issues to be discussed will include:

- How should information competency be established, developed, and supported as part of instructional programs within each college?
- What methods should be used to assess the information competency of students (both across the curriculum and within the disciplines)?
- What factors in the California Community Colleges might encourage the adoption of information competency into the curriculum?

- What factors in the California Community Colleges might inhibit the adoption of information competency into the curriculum?
- How can faculty knowledge of information competency be enhanced?
- How should information competency be discussed intersegmentally?

Due to both the diversity of available information technologies and the increasing amount of information conveyed through electronic interfaces, the instructional coverage of information competency must be expanded. Library orientations and bibliographic instructional programs as currently implemented by the majority of California Community Colleges are not comprehensive enough to fill the needs of our students as they cope with the explosion of information in which they are immersed. The knowledge obtained in traditional library orientations and bibliographic instruction sessions is important and needs to be expanded to include an understanding of the issues such as copyright, free speech, censorship, access and privacy. The goal is to prepare students to work independently using electronic databases and information networks in addition to using traditional written materials to locate and present information.

KEY COMPONENTS

In order to be able to find, evaluate, use, and communicate information, students must be able to demonstrate the following skills in an integrated process:

- State a research question, problem, or issue.
- Determine information requirements in various disciplines for the research questions, problems, or issues.
- Use information technology tools to locate and retrieve relevant information.
- Organize information.
- Analyze and evaluate information.
- Communicate using a variety of information technologies.
- Understand the ethical and legal issues surrounding information and information technology.
- Apply the skills gained in information competency to enable lifelong learning.

Some of these components may already be included in curriculum. It is recommended that faculty review their curriculum to assure that these components are covered.

The emergence of the Information Age makes the ability of students' to locate information for themselves of vital importance to a full educational process. If students are unable to locate, synthesize, and evaluate information, they will not have the skills necessary to succeed in any field. Even if student retention of course content were high, knowledge changes at a rate so great that what is learned today may be inaccurate or irrelevant a few years from now.

This rate of change will impact students' lives. Students must be prepared to navigate successfully through a profusion of print and nonprint media. The challenge is to equip students with the skills and knowledge that will enable them to live satisfying and productive lives in the Information Age.

MODELS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of an information competency program will be most effective if it is integrated horizontally and vertically across the curriculum. An ideal plan would integrate information competency in all courses in the curriculum. A separate course, taken once in a student's career, should not be expected to thoroughly satisfy the key components of information competency. It is recommended that the fundamentals of information competency be introduced in a college orientation/learning skills course. The concept of information competency can then be further developed by embedding them in general education transfer courses and in courses that are required for certificate and/or degree programs.

Because the ability to use information effectively and wisely is crucial to a student's success in higher education, it seems natural to incorporate information competency into the general education curriculum required of all students. It could be added as a separate course, or it could be added as a component in several, or all, of the courses included in the general education curriculum.

It is possible to identify competencies that all students should have, but sometimes discipline-specific competencies are needed. Those competencies should be integrated into the curriculum of that discipline. For example, there are some things about the acquisition of information that nursing students should know that are different than what needs to be known by a student studying fine arts.

Some models for inclusion of information competency into the discipline integrate it into the introductory courses in the discipline sequence. These introductory courses in a discipline typically familiarize students with the methodologies, terminologies, and resources of a discipline, including a variety of ways to acquire information.

Another model treats information competency as an enhancement to already established courses in the discipline--as an "add-on" to the course. For example, students enrolled in a psychology course might gain one extra unit of credit for completing the information competency component, developed by the faculty teaching the course, in consultation with library faculty or other faculty having specific expertise.

ASSESSMENT

Faculty assessment of students' ability to find, evaluate, use and communicate information can be tested through various methods: examination, performance, demonstration, or application of the skills. Just as information competency skills should be distributed throughout the curriculum, so too, should the assessments of student mastery. Information competency skills need continual assessment at every level of the students' course of study.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

Before the information competency of students can be ensured, information competency of the faculty must be ensured, and the time and money needed to do this must be provided. If faculty are to foster information competency skills in their courses, faculty skills must be enhanced. With the rapid pace of technological change, skills need continual updating and renewing.

The need for faculty development is paramount and support must be provided for instructional design. Information competency must also compete with a variety of other faculty development needs and these funds for reassigned time and materials to develop these competencies are often not available.

COLLEGE INFRASTRUCTURE

The information infrastructure of the colleges must be strengthened in order for students to be exposed to the broad range of information and knowledge necessary for a college education and needed for the full development of skills in information competency. In order for students to obtain a good education, they must have access to a wide variety of sources that challenges their minds, encourages them to read and research broadly, and makes them aware of the range and breadth of the knowledge developed by many people and many cultures. Expanding information competency will help students achieve this goal.

INTERSEGMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Public K-16 education is an interdependent and interconnected system. The high schools prepare students for community colleges and community colleges prepare students to transfer to four-year institutions. This same interdependence is crucial in information competency. There must be a concerted effort made among all levels of public education so that information competency skills are emphasized --and funded-- from elementary through four-year institutions, and that these skills also need to be articulated between the different segments of public higher education.

CONCLUSION

Students entering California higher system lack information retrieval skills necessary for a successful collegiate or vocational experience, or to support life long learning. Competency in information skills is paramount for students to learn and apply in life.

Community college faculty have a primary responsibility in determining curriculum and developing a program for information competency on the local campus. In conclusion, an effective program of information competency should:

- be infused throughout the curriculum,
- use a wide range of information resources in problem-solving strategies,
- make effective uses of instructional technologies to teach information competency,
- encompass finding, evaluating, and using information,
- emphasize the ethical and legal issues connected in information, and
- prepare students as producers, as well as consumers, of information.

An environment that will encourage the growth and development of information competency:

- respects the individuality of each community college,
- is built on a collegial partnership of library faculty, instructional faculty, and media and instructional technology professionals,
- is founded on collaboration and articulation with other sectors of California public education,
- promotes the professional development of faculty,
- provides the necessary human and fiscal resources, and
- provides the necessary information and technology resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are:

1. The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges adopt the following definition of information competency:

   Information competency is the ability to find, evaluate, use and communicate information in all its various formats. It combines aspects of library literacy, research methods and technological literacy. Information competency includes consideration of the ethical and legal implications of information and requires the application of both critical thinking and communication skills.

2. The fundamentals of information competency can be introduced into college orientation/learning skills courses. The concepts of information competency can be further developed by embedding them in general education transfer courses and in courses that are required for certificate and/or degree programs.

3. The faculty should review their curriculum to assure that the key components of information competency are covered.

4. The training of faculty on the educational uses of information competency should be a priority in the distribution of faculty development funds.

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